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ABSTRACT

Perspectives on adult students at the College of New Rochelle are offered in response to Howard R. Bowen's address entitled, "Adult Learning, Higher Education, and the Economics of Unused Capacity." The College of New Rochelle suggests a modest modification of Bowen's thesis that there should be efforts toward full integration of programs for traditional students and for the older (adult) learners. It is suggested that in the 10 years of experience in developing a comprehensive program designed exclusively for adults, it has been found that there is much to be gained by a separate but equal education for traditional and nontraditional students. At the College of New Rochelle, the adult degree program, the School of New Resources, has several different components that are based on the recognition of the adult's prior experience, present life circumstances, and different curricular needs. Various locations for classes are designed to increase access, and the interdisciplinary approach to the liberal arts bachelor's degree is designed to meet students' expressed needs. Instruction is offered by seminars, limited to 18 students, and life-experience credits are also awarded. The open admissions policy is supported by noncredit courses in language arts, workshops, and tutoring. Assessment tools are an additional resource to help meet the needs of adult students. It is claimed that the fiscal contributions made by the School of New Resources has enabled the college to expand their graduate school program and other traditional programs. (SW)

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College of New Rochelle Response To: "Adult Learning, Higher Education, and the Economics of Unused Capacity," by Howard R. Bowen

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It was with great interest that I noted Mr. Bowen's inclusion of the term "obligation" in the opening portion of his paper; he asks the direct question, "What are the opportunities and obligations of American higher education in a period of potentially unused capacity?"

To seize the opportunity without recognizing the obligation would be to exploit a growing segment of the higher education clientele, that is, the adult learner.

I will return later to the importance of recognizing our obligation. Let me first address myself to the exiting opportunity we in higher education have been presented, namely the opportunity to exercise Mr. Bowen's Option III, entitled "Redirect Resources Toward New Student Clientele."

The large and virtually untapped pool of adult learners has been recognized by leaders in higher education for many years. Many colleges and universities have been interested in achieving "a nation of educated people" for the past ten years. As a matter of fact, properly organized, Mr. Bowen's Option III, which suggests that present resources be directed toward new student clientele, can produce fiscal results which make his first and second options - relating to higher quality, public service and research - very viable options. Further, there need not

be the need to consider his fourth option - retrenchment. This, however, depends entirely on how well one plans for the adult learner.

In the case of the College of New Rochelle, we have found that the fiscal contributions made by our School of New Resources, our adult program, have enabled us to expand our graduate school program, continue growth in the School of Nursing and surprisingly, we have had one of our most successful enrollments in the traditional under-graduate arts and sciences program. Why? Partly because we were not in a position of panic. We knew that we had income from the new clientele; we were able to seriously and calmly plan and execute sound enrollment programs for the other schools.

While wholeheartedly embracing Mr. Bowen's statement that the higher education system should <u>increase</u> its efforts in the area of adult learning, we at the College of New Rochelle suggest a modest modification of his thesis that we work toward <u>full</u> integration of programs for <u>traditional</u> students <u>and</u> for the <u>older (adult)</u> learners. It is not <u>entirely</u> correct to state that, "on the whole, four year institutions are still groping to find suitable pastures for non-traditional students." Nor is it correct to imply that "Shunting them into separate programs" is necessarily improper nor necessarily results in

lower quality programs. Delivery of a quality program of study is the understood educational goal in all we do with New Resources. As a matter of fact, much of what Mr. Bowen goes on to state supports the consideration of some very different elements in the delivery of educational services to the non-traditional adult learner. In the College of New Rochelle's ten years of experience in developing a comprehensive program designed exclusively for adults, we have found that there is much to be gained by a separate but equal education. We have formed a separate school - the School of New Resources. We did this in 1972 in anticipation of Mr. Bowen's welcome reminder that a large untapped and often unrecognized resource exists in the form of the by-passed or educationally disenfranchised adult.

In the early stages of development, we quickly recognized the difference between the adult and the 18-22 year old student. Mr. Bowen puts this difference very well when he states, "Adult learning is not sharply distinguished from youthful learning except (emphasis me) except for the experiences / of life circumstances / of the learners / which affect their interests and their availability for various modes of instruction." It is precisely because of these two facts - namely, the accumulation of life's experience and life's circumstances, that we should consider alternative, more appropriate delivery systems for the adult learner.

At the College of New Rochelle, the adult degree program, the School of New Resources, has several distinct components which are based on the recognition of the adult's prior experience, his or her present life circumstances, and different curricular needs. At the School of New Resources, the learner and the instructor become partners in the learning process. In fact, the learner, faculty, and staff are all partners in the development of the curriculum and other major program components.

To highlight some of these components, please consider the following:

The Notion of Increased Access; i.e., the means of providing educational opportunities has taken the form in our program of sites, centers and campuses as near to where the student lives and/or works as possible.

We have five full campuses in such diverse communities as a union headquarters, (DC 37, AFSCME), a theological seminary, (New York Theological, 5 West 29th Street), a large apartment house complex, (Co-op City in the Bronx), in the heart of the South Bronx, (151 Melrose Avenue), and at our seventy-five year old campus in New Rochelle.

To further extend the concept of increased access, we have fourteen sites limited in such locations as

churches, synagogues, day care centers, hospitals and corporations in three boroughs of New York City.

Our newest response to the question of access or to the problem of time and distance, is the offering of credit courses on Cable television stations in the New York metropolitan areas. This, again in recognition, of Mr. Bowen's guideline "instructional programs should be offered at times and places accessible to people with job and family obligations."

The understanding of the adults' curricular needs is demonstrated in the School of New Resources' curriculum development process. We include the student in this process and the courses reflect the present and future, personal, academic and career needs of the student.

At the School of New Resources, there are no majors and no fixed departments. The program is a liberal arts based B.A. degree, 120 credits. It is highly interdisciplinary and reflects, in a very different way, the students' expressed needs. This apparently amorphous system is actually a very well organized and often involved process which repeats itself each semester at each campus over a six week period.

Students, staff and resource faculty work together to develop the courses for the subsequent semester. In theory, this could mean over 500 courses new each semester. There are, however, five core courses which are taught by a regular cadre of adjunct faculty and staff faculty. These core courses are primarily for the new student. Clearly, this requires the use of highly qualified faculty, mainly adjunct - many of whom are drawn from the other schools within the College of New Rochelle as additional course loads. / and from other educational institutions in New York metropolitan area.

Of equal importance in the curriculum design is our mode of instruction. We offer only seminars, all limited to eighteen students. The instructors who come to work with us, even for only one semester, are given a comprehensive manual and attend orientation sessions to learn about the adults' learning style and to be reminded that the seminar is designed to draw from the adult student, to treat the adult as a resource in the class.

In our curriculum development process, we support Mr. Bowen's guidelines which suggest "The content

of courses and methods of instruction should be adapted to older adults who are inclined to be more pragmatic and more definite in their objectives . . ." One final example of this adaptation is the awarding of life experience credits.

The School of New Resources awards life-experience credits for the preparation and submission of a Portfolio, a reflective history, which presupposes the education significance and credit value of the adults experiences. Credits are awarded (by panel of 5 reviewers) on the basis of the description and analysis of the adults formative experiences, and the values, and insights generated by these experiences.

Another non-traditional component in the School of New Resources is the admissions process. We stress exit requirements rather than entrance requirements. While a high school diploma or equivalent is strongly preferred, we do accept those adult students who do not have the diploma or equivalent if they are able to demonstrate an acceptable reading and writing level.

For those who are marginal, we offer non-credit courses in language arts both prior to matriculation and throughout their experience with us on an as-needed basis. This additional support is achieved through the non-credit workshops, private and peer tutoring. This admissions process is designed for the busy adult; it stresses dignity and flexibility and minimizes anxiety and stress. This language support, incidentally, is a good example of how the opportunity to serve a new population must be balanced by a recognition of the obligation to provide new kinds of support. At the School of New Resources we spend over $180,000 per year in salaries and program materials to support our language arts departments. All of our language arts programs are provided at no cost to the student. Mr. Bowen's statement in Guideline III ". . . the conventional requirements often become impractical if not meaningless" is reflected we believe in our adult program.

Actually the term flexible is very appropriate for any adult program. The heart of our program, namely the student generated curriculum development process, is the reason why we must be flexible. As the students'

needs shift in our "Future Shock" society, these needs are reflected in curriculum design.

We have to be, therefore, innovative - innovative in faculty selection, innovative in our attention to the new technologies and methodologies such as computer uses (in the home, for example), video-cassettes, cable television, imaginative internship programs, team-teaching and the like.

In order to know what the students who came to New Resources want, we now take careful inventory of their educational requirements and perceived obstacles to attaining a degree. But to be useful to more adults - as potential learners this inventory should be based on the broadest possible community - perhaps the entire state - as is now being considered in New York through the State Education Department's Adult Learning Services.

The College of New Rochelle has been working with Carol Aslanian and the Office of Adult Learning Services at the College Board in developing appropriate inventory instruments, data gathering methods and data analysis methods.

The results of the work being done by Carol's group should be available to colleges, universities and other groups

interested in adult education by this spring. If properly used, this can be a great step -- in planning to meet learning needs of adults.

Secondly, we now use the full series of Student Outcome Information Surveys (SOIS). This series, using local questions liberally, covers new students, continuing students, students who withdraw, graduating students, and alumni.

By using surveys like these, we are able to partially solve the problem posed by Bowen in his Guideline 12 "The problem of balancing demand and supply." The financially risky problem of allowing supply to remain ahead of an unpredictable demand / and the equally unacceptable problem / of inadequate supply for the demand / can be partially solved by a steady flow of data from those with felt needs the student, and those in their communities with a stake in the students' educational development. . . not only but especially Colleges and Universities seeking to meet the higher education needs of adults.

We agree with Howard Bowen and Patricia Cross that the needs assessment alone cannot fully provide us with adequate data. There is another way for colleges and universities to gather appropriate data - particularly local data. This is by

having a separate staff in the College for the adult program (in our case, approximately 40 professionals), who are uniquely and exclusively involved with adult learners. They are experts in their field, they keep current with the literature and research, they attend the many workshops and conference on various aspects of adult higher education, remain active in a nation-wide organization composed of like-minded institutions in adult higher education. This organization is called the Alliance.

As a matter of fact, the Alliance has received funding from the Ford Foundation to develop a series of manuals and to organize regional workshops on the question of how to best establish an adult degree program. Their next workshop is in New Rochelle on November 13th and 14th on the subject of facilitating adult learning.

Yes, there will be a stampede into this new market and it is unquestionably an educational and financial opportunity for American higher education. However, there is also, as Mr. Bowen reminds us, an obligation. We at the College of New Rochelle see the obligation as one where the non-traditional student is taken seriously, is recognized for his/her unique contribution to the learning process. . . we see the obligation to increase access, reduce obstacles and to begin to make the

notion of life-long learning a reality.

Serious attention, professional attention such as College Board is giving to the Adult Learner through Office of Adult Learning Service is an important step in direction of realizing goal of a nation of educated people. It's a development we are proud to be part of.